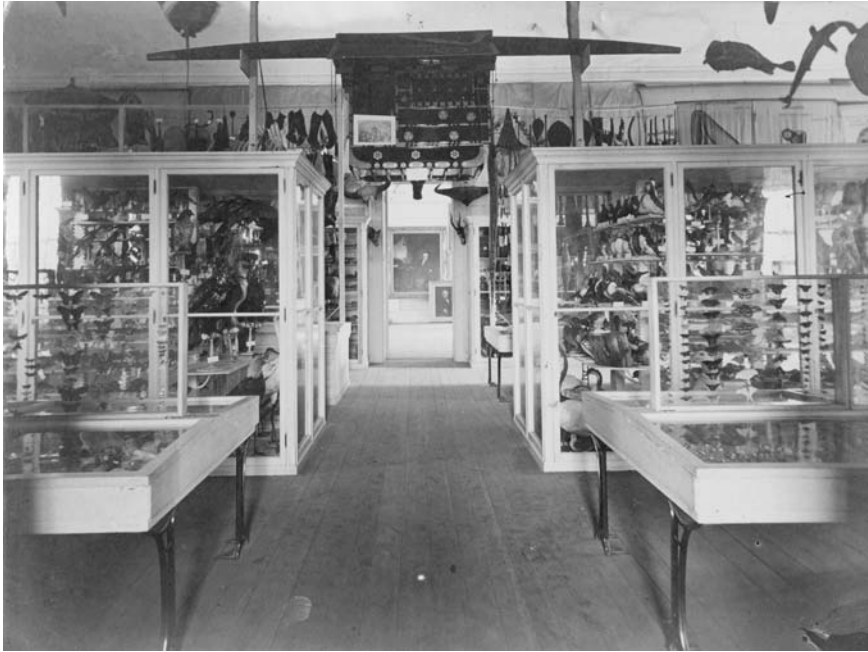


OBJECTS, STORIES, AND VISITORS

A HALF-DOZEN PHOTOGRAPHS of the Jenks Museum survive. They show exhibit cases filled to overflowing, chaos barely contained. Sharks, about a dozen of them, are lined up on top of the cases. Birds are grouped together, in cases; a small plaque in front of each specimen provides its scientific name. Ethnographic items are hung on a wall, apparently organized by type: spears together, knives together. Some of these have tags attached: a name, a place, sometimes a donor, rarely much more. A Japanese palanquin hangs from the ceiling, surrounded by large stuffed animals and skeletons. Many things are simply stuck where there's room: posters showing African wildlife hang on a wall behind a moose skull, next to a diagram of a cow. A camel faces a walrus across an aisle, a sea turtle above. Butterflies take flight above bird eggs.

The museum had no storage space, so everything it had was squeezed into the display. "For the last three years," Jenks wrote in his 1881 annual report, "the want of cases wherein to make a proper display of the contributions, has been an increasing trouble, till at last all classification is broken up, and the specimens in most of the cases are simply packed confusedly."¹ Jenks knew order was important, and when he had room, he worked hard to display things in a way that made sense to him. He wrote a few years later, "As Curator I have given full time to the rearrangement made possible by the completion of the new cases for Anthropology, and hope before the end of the year to have the greater part if not all of the tedious but necessary work completed, and the specimens placed in their



Butterflies, birds, and a Japanese palanquin in the Jenks Museum, about 1890.

respective cabinets according to the latest classification.”² He died before he finished the job.

If he had to choose between collecting more things and a neat, well-ordered display, Jenks chose collecting. He would worry about orderliness later. He believed in showing off his things. Nature showed the glory of God, and so the more of it, the better. Jenks wanted more room, but he would have packed the new space just as tightly.

The photographs, though, provide only a partial vision of the museum. Consider the Jenks Museum not as seen in a photograph but as a space you might walk into. Start with smell: the museum was also a taxidermy workshop, and students remembered the “strength of the odor” and the “foul atmosphere” when Jenks was working on a specimen. Then there’s touch: many of the specimens were in cases or out of reach, but students certainly would have touched what they could, and Jenks opened cases to show off his work. His taxidermy classes gave the students a very hands-on experience. Sounds, too, are missing from the photographs. The mu-

seum was a busy place, with students and visitors from off campus going in and out, classes on the first floor, and labs for physics, chemistry, and biology nearby, as well as Jenks's workshop. There would have been conversations, questions to the students, probably laughter, sometimes Jenks's booming voice.

There were few labels in the museum to explain the objects on display but it would be wrong to think of the museum as a place of things without explanations. One of Jenks's students remembered the experience of visiting:

Professor Jenks could be seen at the museum at any season of the year except while he was abroad collecting specimens for it. Often when visitors entered the room and became interested in some object, suddenly there would arise a loud voice from across the room, and looking around they would see a venerable old man with a long beard as white as snow, having on his head a small cap ornamented with blue trimming. In a pleasant and interesting manner he would explain all about the specimen, where it existed and how it was secured for the museum.³

The still quiet of the photograph fools us. The exhibition was a place of sound, touch, and smell. It was, most important, a place where people interacted, as visitors and explainers. The museum was not simply things in cases. It awakened the senses. It was didactic, social, a place for teaching and learning, for connecting to things and people. Jenks knew the artifacts' stories, and shared them. Families visiting the museum talked about what they saw. Students came on class assignments, with questions to ask and answer. Imagine the museum full of people pointing, talking, touching, sniffing.

The Jenks Museum was fairly simple, as museums go, yet like all museums it was a place where visitors engaged with objects and ideas and each other to create something remarkable. Museum exhibitions are not just spaces for looking but also opportunities for engagement. The wonder of museums is how open-ended they are. Start with people in spaces with things, and you can go everywhere. This part of the book explores the ways that museums create exhibitions from artifacts and stories, how

visitors use the exhibitions for knowledge and pleasure, and how those two activities intersect in the making of meaning.

More Stories than Specimens

Dallas Lore Sharp, one of Jenks's last students, remembered the old museum in an article in the *Atlantic Monthly* decades after it had closed. Jenks, Sharp declared, brought back from his collecting adventures "more stories than specimens." But he was a "museum-maker," and, Sharp lamented, "No museum has had a section, or even a glass case, for stories."⁴

Today, museums *are* places that tell stories. Exhibitions and programs—what museums call interpretation—are how museums tell stories, and story-telling has become increasingly important in the century since the Jenks Museum closed. The artifacts have stories, and the exhibit curator's job is to put those objects and their stories together in a way that tells a larger story. Or more precisely, in a way that allows visitors to learn, experience, engage with, and explore the museum's art, artifacts, and specimens, to see them, and the rest of the world, in a new way. Objects, stories, and visitors work together in a complex dance of showing, watching, listening, discussing, teaching, and learning. Curators, designers, and educators shape exhibitions, and exhibitions shape the ways that visitors engage with art and artifact.

The photographs of the Jenks Museum don't capture its stories. They don't capture the learning that took place there. They don't show that man with the long white beard and small blue-trimmed cap and "pleasant and interesting manner," the hands-on taxidermy workshops, the sensory understandings that the specimens conveyed, or the stories that visitors told each other as they wandered through the museum. They don't capture the narratives the visitors created and the meanings they made as they wandered through the museum, drawn from stuffed shark to exotic bird. Indeed, like so many photographs of exhibitions, they leave out the visitors altogether, the personal experiences and social interactions where museums do their work.

In his *Poetics of Music in the Form of Six Lessons* Igor Stravinsky argued for imagination and intuition in understanding and using the past. "A living illusion is more valuable . . . than a dead reality," he wrote. "The

past slips from our grasp. It leaves us only scattered things. The bond that united them eludes us. Our imagination usually fills in the void.”⁵

Stravinsky was writing about music, but his suggestion applies to museums as well. Exhibitions animate museum objects, retrieving them from their hibernation in drawers and cabinets, introducing them to a new audience, telling their stories. The museum assists our imagination by offering intellectual and physical contexts. Intellectual context is the system, order, and overall meaning: the big picture. Physical context is how objects are put on display. The art of exhibition is deciding how to combine these two types of context to create Stravinsky’s “living illusions” and thus allow visitors to use their imagination.

A museum’s mission, history, collections, expertise, stakeholders, and visitors define the range of stories it tells and how it tells them. What does its mission call for, and what do its collections allow? Who is the audience and what does that audience need or want? Precedent also shapes exhibitions. Curators and critics gasp when a museum tries something new: mixing art and decorative arts! adding videos or interactive touch screens! painting the walls white (before about 1930) or any color other than white (more recently)! Museums change slowly, bound by the weight of tradition as well as the weight of collections.

Within the range set by tradition, though, there’s nuanced debate about what to show and how to show it. I have sat at many conference tables where groups of museum staff, outside consultants, community members, and board members add their ideas to a list of subjects and themes for exhibitions.

It’s a big, crowded conference table. Curators want to show off their best objects and their most recent research. Educators might call attention to curriculum standards. Scientists and historians concern themselves with the big picture, how this particular story fits with larger themes, what they can say that’s new. Designers think about the big picture, too, as well as how it all fits together and the details of display. Audience advocates think about how make the show appeal to visitors, worrying that it will be too dry, too complicated, too academic. Evaluators provide front-end and formative evaluation, reporting the results of audience surveys and tests of prototypes and mockups. Marketers contemplate what might attract an audience; community representatives worry about how to attract new

audiences. Public program staff begins thinking about events. The development office wants to be sure that they can pitch the new exhibit to a donor, or that the donors already committed will approve of how their money is spent. Business development thinks about what products might be sold, and what other museums might be interested in a traveling version of the exhibit. Public affairs think about how to get more visitors. Government affairs people and lawyers fret about what might go wrong. Directors consider the museum as a whole and wonder how the exhibition advances the mission. Project managers plot resources and budgets. Collections managers and conservators start to think about preparing the art and artifacts to be displayed. Some museums ask each department to vote on each section of a proposed exhibit, to decide what to include. Some undertake surveys to gauge audience interest.

Who sits at that table is important. Some get a seat because of subject-matter expertise, or because they represent a community that has a relationship with the artifacts or the story being told. Others are there because they speak for or understand the museum's audience, or because they put up money for the project. Anthropologist James Clifford describes museums as "contact zones," places where meaning is cocreated by both curators and communities.⁶ There are also many other groups, inside and outside the museum, eager for a seat at the exhibition development table, and their inclusion usually leads to better exhibitions and more audience engagement.

The process of deciding who decides, and how, takes up a lot of time and energy in museums. Museums have learned the hard way what can happen when the right people aren't at the table or don't feel listened to: not only controversy and a backlash that can hurt the museum, but also a story not fully told. For example, when the Metropolitan Museum of Art didn't include Harlem residents in the planning of its 1969 "Harlem on My Mind" exhibition and the exhibit was met with wide-ranging disapproval. "A white man's view of Harlem," a local black newspaper called it.⁷ Vietnamese-Americans protested because they didn't feel their story was told in a 2004 exhibition on "California and the Vietnam Era" at the Oakland Museum. "They should have given us a chance to add another dimension to the story," a Vietnamese-American curatorial consultant told a newspaper reporter.⁸ It's only very recently that indigenous communities have had a say in the way they were portrayed in museums, correcting an

absence that had led many earlier exhibitions to tell misleading, inappropriate, and incomplete stories.

Other examples show the challenges of engagement. In 1994 the National Air and Space Museum found itself in political difficulties because Air Force veterans didn't feel they were listened to in a planned exhibit on the atomic bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. The result was a political crisis for the entire Smithsonian, and a revised exhibition that was more technological than historical. But there were other communities that were as involved in the story—Japanese survivors of the atomic bombing, for example—that found themselves cut out, without the political clout to shape the story.⁹ The challenge is not only getting the right people at the table but also taking the time to listen and respond to them. Exhibition development requires conversation and, often, compromise. It's not easy.

Consider a local historical society deciding on its next exhibit. First, they must decide who sits at the table: do they represent themselves, everyone who feels a connection to the historical society, or everyone in town? Where should they draw the lines around "local"? Next, they must consider what will draw a crowd, what historians think is important about the town's history, and what story will be interesting, or useful, to which groups in the town. They need to look at what their museum can do that other organizations can't, what they have funding for, and whether the exhibit might bring new collections to the museum. They should also consider what the existing audience would like to see and how the exhibit might allow the museum to expand its audience.

Then there are the philosophical questions. Limit the stories told to those supported by the collections, or tell an important story in ways that push beyond what the collections allow? Tell a traditional story, or a new one? One that captures what makes the town unique, or one that shows it as part of a larger regional or national story? The answer to all of these questions will depend on the first item: who gets to decide.

For a very different, but overlapping, set of concerns, consider the decisions that the Whitney Museum of American Art made in its 2015 "America is Hard to See." The exhibit, an overview of the museum's collections, inaugurated its new building. Holland Cotter, reviewing the exhibit for the *New York Times*, noted the importance of who made the decisions: "it's the institutional thinking, inherently political, that matters—determining first

what and who goes into the collection, then what goes into the public spaces and lastly what new, alternative eyes will be coming on board to oversee these things.”¹⁰ The museum needed to weigh curatorial judgments based on aesthetics and art history against educators’ expertise about the way that the audience understands and appreciates art. It needed to consider its various audiences: experts, American and international tourists, locals, students, and more. The museum curators, educators, designers, and board balanced these considerations to create a display that has something for almost everyone—except for those who wished the museum had presented a more focused exhibition, rather than an overview.

Once museums determine which stories to tell they consider the best way to present them. The historical society might use period rooms, artifacts in cases, photographs, labels, or hands-on activities. It might focus on a few case studies or try to cover an entire history. It might focus on biography, or on buildings, or on tools and equipment. Perhaps there could be a costumed interpreter, pretending to visit from the past.

The new Whitney faced a different set of challenges, such as how it should split the exhibit space between its deep historical collections and the contemporary work for which it was now best known. Should it present the works in chronological order or thematically and if chronologically, what and how many chapters would be appropriate? The museum might try to show the full diversity of American art or focus on what seemed—either at the time or in retrospect—most important. Do the collections do a good job of representing the history the museum now thinks important, or should the museum acquire more works for a show this ambitious? How much explanation will the art need?

Every museum faces similar issues. The Whitney, the Museum of Modern Art, and the new Met Brauer may show similar art, but each displays it differently to tell different stories. The same object might be shown in an art, history, or anthropology museum to make different points. Objects can be shown to enhance their beauty, to increase their accessibility, or to revel in their mystery. They can be shown with related objects, encouraging visitors to think about a moment in time, or with those that provide a contrast, calling attention to change over time and place. Labels can provide aesthetic, historical, or systematic information. (No labels at all send a different message.) Interactives can provide new perspectives or

more information, connect to other objects, or show details. The physical context—a quiet room or an immersive setting, a timeline or a treasure show—might encourage contemplation, active learning, or a call to action. Different audiences appreciate different exhibit techniques.

Museum educator Margaret A. Lindauer suggests that there are four basic types of exhibition. *Laissez-faire* exhibitions invite visitors to explore, attracted to whatever interests them. They may or may not follow the path the curator had in mind, but that's up to them; they're there to enjoy themselves, to learn what they want to learn.¹¹ The opposite are *narrative* exhibits, which tell a story. Some museums put footprints on the floor, to show visitors the path to follow. A third type of exhibit, which Lindauer calls *authoritative*, is designed to teach. The curator has something he or she thinks is important for the visitor to learn and arranges the artifacts and contexts to make that point. Success is judged by how well the visitor acquires the knowledge. Finally, constructivist exhibits give visitors a chance to solve problems, to learn how to think about issues. Constructivist exhibits are places for dialog, a chance for visitors to develop new ideas or to compare perspectives on a problem.

Each of these exhibition types has its place, and part of the exhibition developer's job is to consider the exhibition's goals and audiences, weigh them against the artifacts, expertise, and funds available, and make choices. Exhibition development is an art, not a science, and no exhibition will work for every visitor.

Visitors Making Meaning

Museums are more than just places with things: they are places with things *and people*, that is, social spaces. Exhibitions are created for an audience, and museums need to know their audience. The American Alliance of Museums claims 850 million visits to American museums in 2015, and is eager to note that that's more than the attendance at all major league sporting events and theme parks combined. Two-thirds of Americans visit a museum each year. It's a diverse group, but not as diverse as it should be: it's older, whiter, richer, and (the best predictor) better-educated than average. The percentage of the non-Hispanic white population who visited an art museum in a given year is roughly twice that of the African

American or Hispanic population. Museums are not places where everyone is welcomed, or feels welcome.¹²

Museum visitors are also diverse in their range of interests and learning styles. There are many ways to categorize these. One useful approach is a Smithsonian study that finds four types of things attract visitor interest in exhibitions: *ideas* (concepts, abstractions, facts, and reasons); *people* (human connection, stories, and social interactions); *objects* (aesthetics, craftsmanship, and visual language); and *physical sensations* (movement, touch, sound, taste, light, and smell). Smithsonian researcher Andrew Pekarik calls this the IPOP theory of experience preference. It helps explain what visitors notice and what they do in exhibits, and also how they judge the quality of their experience in the exhibit. Understanding IPOP preferences and interests reminds exhibition creators of the audience's diversity and that visitors come to museums not as blank slates to be written on by curators. Visitors participate in a range of experiences—intellectual, artificial, social, and experiential—in their own distinctive ways.¹³

Exhibition makers and visitors cocreate meaning. The exhibition developer chooses the objects, decides the story to be told, and designs the presentation that he or she believes gives visitors the best opportunity for new understanding. Visitors choose how they experience the exhibition, making choices based on what interests them, what attracts their attention. They piece together a story that makes sense to them. An exhibition is best considered not as a place for teaching but as a place that allows for a range of engagement.

How best to do that? Psychologist Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi advances a useful theory of visitor engagement in museums. He uses the word “flow” to describe circumstances where people are engaged. People in flow tend to feel that they are both fully expressing the self and that they are connected to others. The flow experience depends on clear goals, appropriate rules, and immediate and unambiguous feedback; the challenges must match the skills of the individual. Csikszentmihalyi suggests that museum exhibits can create the flow experience by capturing visitors' curiosity, addressing their interests, making links with their lives, and proposing alternative perspectives. “When the visitor is interested in an exhibit and engaged through sensory, intellectual, and emotional faculties,” he writes, “he or she should be ready to experience an intrinsically rewarding, op-

timal experience.”¹⁴ Museum experts talk about free-choice learning and curiosity-driven visitors; both terms suggest the importance of letting visitors explore at their own speed, choosing their own path, to make the connections to objects and stories that offer meaning and fit their interests and ways of learning.

Organizing objects in a way that encourages flow is the museum’s challenge. Exhibitions have the advantage, over other media, that visitors do literally flow through them. They are free to move through exhibition at a speed, and on a path, that keeps them interested. Exhibitions turn the motion of the visitor into narrative. History museum exhibition developer Richard Rabinowitz offers a view of an exhibition as a stage on which visitors perform, on which they cocreate meaning. “The museum curator,” he writes, “becomes a theater director operating in two time frames at once. The contents of an exhibit case are transformed into an animated field of action. To interpret is to imagine one cast of historical actors stepping out of the document, and another set of modern-day visitors coming across it. Historical time and exhibit time flow together.”¹⁵

A good museum exhibit starts where the visitors are. It builds on their interests and knowledge to let them engage with the past, or art, or science—and with each other. The National Park Service’s *Interp Guide*, the Bible for park rangers, describes their work this way: they use “the history of an individual visitor’s experiences, in conjunction with their contemporary experiences with heritage resources, to provoke visitors to consider a broad range of ideas and perspectives about the resources, and to arrive at their own conclusions about them.”¹⁶ This builds on the work of Freeman Tilden, whose 1957 *Interpreting Our Heritage* still shapes modern practice. Tilden recommends this general principle: “Interpretation that does not somehow relate what is being displayed or described to something within the personality or experience of the visitor will be sterile.”¹⁷

Put the right things next to each other, in the right order, offer visitors the right kinds of opportunities to interact with them, provide thought-provoking advice and information and direction, and a rewarding, pleasant place to wander, and you move beyond making an argument. You allow for thoughtful conversation, for significant engagement, for the making of meaning.

This doesn't mean that visitors will follow your arrangement, or that the ideas in your head will be magically transferred to the heads of the visitors. Jay Rounds, a professor of museum studies, defends what he calls the meandering visitor. Visitors, he writes, summarizing many museum surveys, "meander about the museum, sampling randomly here and there, ignoring most of the exhibits, choosing in a seemingly haphazard manner those to which they do attend carefully. . . . They fail to use the exhibitions in the thorough and systematic way that should reward them with the greatest educational benefits." While some museum professionals see this as (in Rounds's words) a "source of despair," he argues that it is in fact a smart way for the visitor to see the museum. Visitors are there to pique and satisfy their curiosity. They seek "wide but shallow learning," not to memorize facts or imbibe a curator's narrative. They pick and choose what they want to see. Museum visitors are free-range learners.¹⁸

Learning from Visitors

Museum exhibitions entertain, educate, and engage. Visitors seek opportunities for learning, enjoyment, reflection, and inspiration, as well as a pleasant place for a social experience. When both the museum's and the visitors' goals are met, the exhibition is a success.

But exhibition is not an easy medium. Almost every discussion of exhibitions laments the difficulty of teaching through the display of objects.

Museums can be exhausting. Henry James, the American writer who was fascinated by the world of museums, describes a weary museum goer in *The American*: "He had performed great physical feats which left him less jaded than his tranquil stroll through the Louvre. . . . His attention had been strained and his eyes dazzled, and he had sat down with an aesthetic headache."¹⁹ Charlotte Brontë, in *Villette*, laments that a museum visit resulted in "a combined pressure of physical lassitude and entire mental incapacity."²⁰ Benjamin Ives Gilman of Boston's Museum of Fine Arts coined the term "museum fatigue" in 1916 to describe the result of the "inordinate amount of physical effort" demanded by the way museums display things. Museum fatigue, Gilman postulates, causes the visitor to quickly lose interest and "resign himself to seeing practically everything imperfectly and by a passing glance."²¹

It's not just that museums tire visitors out. They're also difficult places for learning. Consider the challenges: trying to concentrate while standing up; having a transcendent, contemplative experience in a crowd; learning from an experience designed for an average visitor. Nelson Goodman, professor of philosophy at Harvard, gave a damning description of the museum as a place of learning at the American Association of Museums 1983 convention. "The circumstances for viewing in a museum are at best abnormal and adverse," he told the assembled professionals. The museum was a "place hostile to the achievement of its own main purpose."²²

A Smithsonian overview of audience surveys found that these critics are right. Exhibitions seldom meet their goals: "One of the most striking results of this generation-worth of museum audience studies is that the explicit aims of exhibition planners are rarely achieved to any significant degree. In study after study . . . researchers found that the central goals of the exhibition team (which are usually learning goals) were rarely met for more than half of the visitors."²³

Visitor studies suggest what works and how museums can do better. Henry Hugh Higgins, honorary curator of invertebrates at the World Museum and the first president of the British Museums Association, was also the first to undertake visitor evaluation. Some two thousand people per day visited the museum, and no one had thought to ask them about their experience. He wrote in 1884 that "a series of observations on the constituents of this irregular procession of visitors, combined with overtures suitable for inducing them to make remarks on the objects exhibited . . . might lead to much valuable information."²⁴

And so he watched visitors in exhibits and asked them what they thought of the objects they saw. Only about 1 or 2 percent of the visitors were "students," there with a particular learning goal in mind. Observers, "who fix their attention with more or less intelligence on the objects displayed," made up about 78 percent of the visitors. The other 20 percent, including most children, were "loungers." It was easy to see this last group, especially the children, as "unmitigated plagues," but he noted that they occasionally noticed "a bird or a butterfly or a fossil with desultory but by no means vacant looks." Higgins watched his visitors, talked to them, and came away impressed with the enormous variety of ways that they used the museum.

Since Higgins's time, many researchers have tracked visitors and used that information to divide them into groups based on behavior. There are serious shoppers, window shoppers, and impulse shoppers. There are ants, butterflies, grasshoppers, and fish. Diligent visitors, and drifters. Streakers, strollers, and studiers. Different people behave differently.²⁵

Researchers at the Smithsonian's Office of Policy and Analysis use three overlapping sets of rubrics to help understand visitors' exhibition experiences. They consider four general categories of experience: social, object-based, cognitive, and introspective. They look at eleven types of exhibition interaction, including being moved by beauty; connecting with the emotional experiences of others; imagining other times or places; enriching understanding; and seeing rare, valuable, or uncommon things. They ask visitors to rank exhibit features like design, lighting, computer interactives, organization, and amount of text. Together, these three kinds of analysis offer a sense of visitor experience, including what visitors get from the exhibit, whether they get what they wanted, and whether they were pleasantly surprised. Of interest to the exhibit developer, it also suggests what worked, and why.²⁶

Museum evaluator Beverly Serrell presents another set of criteria for judging exhibits: balancing museum goals with visitor experiences. First, she considers visitor comfort, both physical and psychological; it's hard to learn if the ergonomics are bad, you're not sure what to do, and you don't feel welcome. Next, she looks at engagement: whether the exhibit invites exploration, social behavior, and a connection through a variety of sensory modalities. Then reinforcement: do visitors have "abundant opportunities to be successful and feel intellectually competent"? And finally, meaning: whether the exhibition is relevant, important, and useful; whether it changes visitors' beliefs or attitudes.²⁷

There's another kind of evaluation of the museum experience that takes a longer view. If the museum's goal is to teach or to change lives—not just to give visitors a pleasant, informative, or meaningful experience—then it's important to see what visitors remember weeks or months later. Audrey Hepburn captures the sense of this when she writes that "living is like tearing through a museum. Not until later do you really start absorbing what you saw, thinking about it, looking it up in a book, and remembering—because you can't take it in all at once."²⁸

Studies show that museum visits do have long-term effects. Museum evaluation expert John Falk writes that “beyond all reason, people remember their visits to museums.” Months and years later, they remember not only that they went but surprising details of the visit. One study found that more than half of the memories were about objects or things, one quarter were related to the visit, and one quarter were associated with feelings and judgments about either the visit or the exhibit. About 10 percent of the memories were “summary memories,” reflecting on the visit afterward. Over time, specific memories tended to disappear, replaced by “big picture” memories. Falk writes of the importance of identity in the museum experience, and that’s true of museum memories too: we remember what connects with who we are and what we care about.²⁹

Feedback from studies like these can be useful for understanding visitors and their experience. But using information about visitor experience to improve that experience is a challenge. In that first survey, in 1884, Higgins assures his readers that of course one would never allow the “interests of ordinary observers . . . to take the lead in determining the construction or arrangement of a museum”—“a groundless apprehension,” he calls it—and yet he suggests that it might be wise to, at least, take it into account.³⁰

Museums are still trying to figure out how to do that. Should exhibitions give visitors what they want? Some argue against treating visitors as customers and in favor of considering them students, or citizens, or cocreators of meaning. Should the museum offer something for everyone? That attitude can attract a wide audience but leave many unmoved and make its most fervent supporters unhappy. Should it concentrate on what it can do that no other institution can, and focus on art and artifact, and a social space? Or should it provide what a community needs most, even if that is beyond the museum’s narrowly defined mission or strength? Should it shape the visitor experience for those who already know and love museums, or attract underserved audiences, a harder audience to reach?

With the goals decided, it’s the job of exhibition developers to organize the relationships of objects, stories, and visitors to try to meet them. Chapters 10 through 14 outline the tools they have to do this work.